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SUBJECT: GREEK "NEW MEDIA" SEEK YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PRE-ELECTION
DEBATES

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SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

¶1. (SBU) When snap Greek parliamentary elections were announced in August for September 16, three major media outlets attempted to draw young viewers and internet-users into the election through innovative internet and television programs, including the first YouTube debate in Europe. Greece's internet penetration, 33.5%, is the lowest among EU-15 states, comparable to rates in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. High-speed penetration is even lower, at 2.5% - 3.0% for broadband lines. While this was a serious hindrance, and there is thus little chance that these experiments influenced the election outcome, they met with moderate success and almost certainly will continue.

SKAI TV AND YOUTUBE

¶2. (U) In announcing the "SKAI YouTube Debates," the station noted the recent successful YouTube/CNN partnership for political debates in the U.S., which allowed ordinary citizens to come "face-to-face" with candidates. SKAI encouraged Greeks to do the same "for the first time in Europe." One blogger has since written, "This is Americana, but in a good sense."

¶3. (U) Beginning September 6, 2007 and concluding this week, Greek's SKAI TV station aired a series of five debates in partnership with "YouTube," a video sharing service founded in the U.S. SKAI asked Greek YouTube users, mostly youth, to post videos with questions for the candidates in a special area of the YouTube site (<http://www.youtube.com/skaidebates>), and then collected those videos to present at televised debates.

¶4. (SBU) Questions were submitted mostly by young, well-educated professionals in their 30s, and covered a broad spectrum of political and social issues, from the environment to tourism, economic development, immigration issues, the cost of living and gay marriage. The debates featured two to four mid- to high-level party candidates, including current parliamentarians, ministers, and former ministers from major political parties like the ruling center-right New Democracy party, main opposition social democrats PASOK, the communist KKE party, ultra-liberal SYRIZA, nationalist LAOS, and right-wing DIANNA. Party leaders did not take part.

¶5. (U) The debates were moderated by prominent journalists from the SKAI TV staff. Moderators showed the YouTube videos, directed the questions to an appropriate candidate, and either asked

follow-ons or allowed responses from other candidates. As during the mainstream nationally-televised debate on September 6, candidates were allowed a short, set time to respond (in this case 1 minute 20 seconds), and they generally observed it.

¶6. (SBU) For the week of September 10-14, YouTube lists a total of 361 subscribers to the SKAI TV debates section of the site, and its videos were viewed 17,152 times. It was the 35th "most-subscribed" site on YouTube for that week. These numbers may seem small, but SKAI TV was launched less than a year ago (as part of the same group that owns the Kathimerini newspapers), and is still building from a small audience share of 3.7%.

¶7. (SBU) SKAI TV told us they had to send a news crew to several areas outside Athens to record questions from people that did not have access to the internet. Bloggers speculate that SKAI sent out these crews because they did not get enough internet questions, and consequently "Greece is probably not ready for YouTube debates." Nielsen ratings are still pending, the station says.

"SAY HELLO TO POWER" VIDEO DEBATES

¶8. (U) Greek "lifestyle"-oriented Star Television (10.7% audience share) shirked the internet in reaching out to youth during the pre-election period. The channel featured a daily series of debates hosted by prominent journalist Thanassis Lalas. As in the SKAI TV case, the debates featured questions posed by young Greeks through video recorded by STAR on the streets. The title of the series, "Say Hello to Power," refers to a popular song by a Greek rocker.

¶9. (U) These debates featured prominent politicians from the main parties who gave brief, one or two sentence answers to the video questions, almost as in a TV quiz show. A live audience of mostly university students was frequently shown during broadcasts.

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E-DEBATES ON IN.GR

¶10. (U) Greece's largest and best-established internet news portal, www.in.gr, entered parties in this Greek election campaign, as people of all ages sought alternatives to the two main political blocks in the aftermath of the recent devastating fires. While Greek popular acceptance and support for U.S. government policies, like internet penetration, is among the lowest in Europe, these attempts by Greek media to apply American technology are another reminder that the U.S. is still an important "role model" here. After the elections, we plan to post the USINFO piece about the CNN/YouTube debate, customized to include a mention of the Greek version, to our new youth-oriented website, Mosaiko.gr.